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PLAYER IDENTIFICATION

Field of the Invention

This invention relates to a player identification system and, more particularly, to a player identification system that can be employed in conjunction with betting terminals. The invention extends to a method of identifying players at betting terminals.

Background to the Invention

Betting terminals have become increasingly common in a number of different jurisdictions that have a regulated gambling industry.

Such a betting terminal has a player console that offers a player a menu of one or more games of chance that the player can select to play. Each game of chance has outcomes that are determined by random events, usually generated by means of a random number generator implemented in software. The software random number generator may be executed locally within the player console itself, or may be implemented externally in a gaming server, which is linked to the betting terminal by means of a communication network. In the latter topology, one or more separate player consoles may be connected to a single external gaming server by means of the communication network.

It is usual for the player to play any of the games of chance by means of pre-purchased credit. For reasons of simplicity and convenience it is customary for

the player console to be equipped with a coin-receiving mechanism and a banknote reader that will allow the player to acquire credit in a simple manner without the necessity of using payment tokens such as credit cards, debit cards and the like. The player console may also be equipped with a printer that prints

5   out an encoded voucher on demand when the player desires to terminate his playing session and to cash out any credit that he may have accumulated. The voucher may be redeemed for value from an operator of the betting terminal.

The games of chance offered by the player console may offer jackpot prizes that

10 can be won from time to time.

Such a player console operates in an "always on" mode, in the sense that no player login or authentication is required in order to play any of the games of chance. The player console may be located at a convenient location, such as a

15 betting shop, an entertainment venue, or the like. The gaming server to which the player console is linked may also be located with the player console, or may be located remotely therefrom.

It is possible that disputes may arise from time to time between different players over the right to cash out from any particular betting terminal, especially when a

20 jackpot prize has been won.

Object of the Invention

25 It is an object of this invention to provide a player identification system, and a method of identifying players at betting terminals that will, at least partially, alleviate the abovementioned difficulties and disadvantages.

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Summary of the Invention

In accordance with this invention there is provided a player identification system, comprising:

5   a betting terminal operable by a player to play at least one game thereon and to place a wager on an outcome of any turn of the game, the outcome of each turn the game being determined, at least in part, by chance; and

a camera associated with the betting terminal, the camera being arranged to capture an image of the player operating the betting terminal at least once during

10   each turn of the at least one game.

Further features of the invention provide for the player identification system to include a logging facility capable of logging, for each turn of the at least one game, logging data representative of a size and type of the wager placed by the

15   player on the turn of the game, the corresponding outcome of that turn of the game, and the image of the player captured by the camera during the turn of the game, for the betting terminal to be operable by the player to play any one of a number of different selectable games, for the camera to be arranged to capture the image of the player operating the betting terminal at least once during each

20   turn of any game being played by the player, and for the logging data to be representative, also, of the particular game being played by the player.

Still further features of the invention provide for the logging facility to include a non-volatile storage memory for storing the logging data thereon, for the storage

25   memory to be configured as a rolling buffer capable of storing logging data relating to a number of the most recent turns of any games played by the player, for the player identification system to include an enquiry facility operable to display any logging data contained in the storage memory, and for the player identification system to include a display monitor capable of displaying any image

30   of the player contained in the storage memory.

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The invention extends to a method for identifying players at a betting terminal, comprising the steps of:

enabling a player to operate a betting terminal to play at least one game thereon and to place a wager on an outcome of any turn of the game, the outcome of
5   each turn the game being determined, at least in part, by chance; and

capturing, at least once during each turn of the at least one game, a camera image of the player operating the betting terminal.

There is further provided for the method to include a step of logging, for each turn
10   of the at least one game, logging data representative of a size and type of the wager placed by the player on the turn of the game, the corresponding outcome of that turn of the game, and the image of the player captured by the camera during the turn of the game, for enabling the player to operate the betting . terminal to play any one of a number of different selectable games, for capturing
15 . the image of the player operating the betting terminal at least once during each turn of any game being played by the player, and for logging additional data representative of the particular game being played by the player.

There is still further provided for storing the logging data on a non-volatile storage
20   memory, for configuring the storage memory as a rolling buffer capable of storing logging data relating to a number of the most recent turns of any games played by the player, for displaying any logging data contained in the storage memory on an enquiry facility, and for displaying any image of the player, contained in the storage memory, on a display monitor included in the enquiry facility.
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Brief Description of the Drawings

A preferred embodiment of the invention is described below, by way of example
30   only, and with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

Figure 1 is a functional representation of a player identification system according to the invention, shown in conjunction with a betting terminal.

5   Detailed Description of the Invention

Referring to Figure 1, a player identification system is indicated generally by reference numeral (100).

10   The player identification system (100) is associated with a betting terminal indicated generally by reference numeral (1) that includes a gaming server (2) and a user access facility (3) in the form of a player console having a touch screen (4), a banknote reader (5), a coin receiving mechanism (6) such as a coin slot, and a thermal printer (7). The player console also includes an Internet-

15   enabled processor (8) which is in communication with the gaming server (2) by means of a communication network (9) that is, in this embodiment, the Internet.

The player console (3) is located remotely from the gaming server (2) and is usable by a player to play any one of a number of different video games that are

20   available for play. A menu of available games is presented to the player on the touch screen (4) and the player is able to select any one of the games in the menu for play by touching a corresponding icon (not shown) displayed on the screen in a manner that is well known in the art.

25   The Internet-enabled processor (8) is a conventional personal computer operating under a Windows 2000 operating system, which is well known and commercially available from the Microsoft Corporation of Seattle, Washington, USA. The Internet-enabled processor (8) and the gaming server (2) execute different components of any available game that is selected for play by the

30   player. Each game consists of a client process that is executed in the processor (8) and a server process that is executed in the gaming server (2). The client process of a selected game simulates the progress of the game on the touch

screen (4), while the server process generates, upon request of the of the client process, one or more random events that determine an outcome or outcomes of a turn of the game. The client process obtains the result of the random event from the gaming server (2) along the communication network (9) and utilises the
5   result to display a corresponding outcome of the game to the player in an intelligible manner by means of the simulation on the touch screen (4).

Each one of the available games is playable by the player against the consumption of credit. The player may insert one or more banknotes into the
10   banknote reader (5) and coins into the coin slot (6) in order to procure credit to play any of the games, without the need to use payment tokens such as debit cards, credit cards or the like. The player's credit balance is displayed on the touch screen (4) at all times. The player utilises his credit to place a wager on every turn of the games that he selects for play. The outcome of any wager is
15   either an unsuccessful outcome in which the player's wager is forfeited to an operator of the betting terminal (1), or a successful outcome in which the player's wager is paid out at predetermined odds.

The player identification system (100) includes a logging database (10) remote
20   from the player console (3), which is accessible by means of the communication network (9). The operation of the logging database (10) will be described in more detail in the description that follows. The player identification system (100) includes, further, a logging facility in the form of a non-volatile storage memory (11) and a logging application software program (12) that is executable in the
25   processor (8) of the player console (3). The non-volatile storage memory (11) is a local Random Access Memory circular buffer and is sized to store transaction data corresponding to a predetermined number, say 20, of consecutive wagers made by the player. The transaction data is buffered in the circular buffer (11) by the logging application software program (12) that executes in the processor (8)
30   of the player console (3).

The player identification system (100) also includes a camera (13) arranged to capture an image of a player using the player console (3) to play any available game thereon. The client process that executes in the processor (8) activates the camera (13) to capture the image of the player operating the player console (3) at least once during each turn of any game played by the player at the console.

The transaction data corresponding to any particular wager includes data relating to the size and type of the wager, the outcome of the wager, the size of a prize won by the player for a successful wager, an identification code corresponding to the selected game on which the wager was placed, a further identification code corresponding to a player console from which the wager was made by the player, and the image taken by the camera (13) of the player who made the wager. The logging application software program (12) downloads the buffered transaction data to the logging database (10) when the local buffer (11) is full and, once the download is complete, flushes the local buffer.

The player identification system (100) includes an enquiry facility (14) connected to the communication network (9). The enquiry facility (14) is a conventional computer workstation capable of accessing the transaction data contained in the logging database (10). In particular, the enquiry facility (14) enables the stored image of the player corresponding to any particular wager to be displayed on a display monitor of the computer workstation for viewing by interested parties.

Numerous modifications are possible to this embodiment without departing from the scope of the invention. In particular, the betting terminal (1) may include more than one player console (3) communicable with the gaming server (2). Each player console (3) has a corresponding camera (13), local buffer (11) and logging application software program (12). In this instance, the downloaded contents from the different local buffers (11) of the display consoles (3) are consolidated and merged into the remote logging database (10). The merged transaction data in the remote logging database (10) is available for the performance of offline queries.

Further, the gaming server (2) and the camera (13) may be integrated within the display console (3) to provide, effectively, a standalone betting terminal. In this instance, the functionality of the gaming server (2) and the processor (8) in the

5   display console (3) may be consolidated, necessitating only a single processor for the betting terminal (1) Further, the remote logging database (10) may also be integrated within the display console (3), making it possible to dispense with the use of an open communication network (9) such as the Internet and rely, instead, on a closed communication network or a local communication bus.

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The invention therefore provides a player identification system that enables the identification of users of a betting terminal to be checked and verified.